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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000354

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE: JULY 11, 2007: BAINIMARAMA AND
TELENI SAY ELECTIONS WILL ONLY TAKE PLACE WHEN THE MILITARY
IS READY; AHKOY TO BE AMBASSADOR TO CHINA, ACCOMPANIED BY
BAINIMARAMA'S BANDLEADER; TWO UNIONS CALL OFF STRIKE PLANS

REF: SUVA 333 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

11. (C) New interim Police Commissioner and RFMF Deputy Teleni told a group of professionals that the military would never allow the SDL to regain power, even if it won the next election. Teleni said the RFMF would ignore any negative court rulings and only hold elections when it is ready. Continuing on the same themes, Bainimarama said in a NZ TV interview that early elections are not acceptable because "the same brand of people" who won the last election would be brought back to power. The timing of elections, he said, "will be everybody's guess." Businessman and Embassy landlord Sir James AhKoy has been tapped to be the new Ambassador to China with erstwhile RFMF bandleader and current RFMF spokesperson Teleni to be defense attache. AhKoy and interim government officials are actively promoting a "look north policy" for aid, infrastructure, and a land-lease scheme. Two public sector unions announced July 10 they would not strike in return for an agreement wherein 1% of the already instituted 5% pay cut would be restored by the end of the year. Other unions have labeled this a sell-out and insist they will continue with their strike plans. End summary.

Unusually revealing comments from Capt. Teleni

12. (C) A well-placed interlocutor informed us of a recent conversation between interim Police Commissioner (and Deputy RFMF Commander) Teleni and a group of professionals in Fiji. Asked the role of the military, Teleni reiterated the expansive RFMF view: to protect the welfare of society. Asked what would happen if Qarase's SDL party were to win the next election, Teleni reportedly said: "We will not allow that. It won't happen. It will not be allowed. Nowhere after a coup is the deposed government allowed to return." Asked what will happen if the courts rule against the coup, Teleni reportedly said: "We will ignore any such court rulings. We will go back to elections only when we are ready." Asked about the militarization of the civil service, Teleni reportedly said: "We were experiencing passive resistance in the civil service." Thus, installing military inside is "necessary to make things happen." We are told the civilian professionals were quite taken aback by the conversation.

Bainimarama commitment to democracy...eventually

¶3. (U) In an interview with TV New Zealand's "Hard Pill to Swallow" program aired July 8, Bainimarama said he is personally committed to seeing Fiji return to full democratic rule. However, he asked, "How do you define democracy...is an election democracy?" He predicted that an early election would bring "the same brand of people" back to power, and they would turn Fiji "upside down again." Asked when exactly Fiji will have elections, Bainimarama said: "Elections will be everybody's guess." Asked about deaths in military custody, Bainimarama said the military doesn't endorse that. "We don't endorse any brutality, and we don't like that. Anyone who has done that is taken in for questioning and is taken to task." Asked if he will step down if he can't institute his set of reforms, Bainimarama said, "Never." He took power to institute the reforms and he will persevere until the mission is completed.

Military diplomats; businessman to China

¶4. (C) As previously reported, the IG has publicly announced it intends to send Land Forces Commander Col. Pita Driti as High Commissioner to Malaysia (though KL has not yet provided agreement), and Land Forces Chief of Staff LtCol. Mason Smith as milrep to the Fiji mission to the UN in New York (though we have not yet received a visa request). The IG has also announced its intention to send businessman Sir James AhKoy as Ambassador to China, with RFMF spokesman and bandmaster Maj. Leweni as Defense Attache. Again, it appears agreement has not yet been received. AhKoy was a stalwart Minister in the Rabuka governments of the 1990s, is a father figure to

SUVA 00000354 002 OF 002

2000 coup leader George Speight, is half-Chinese with many interests in China, was knighted by the UK at request of PNG PM Somare, and is the Embassy Suva landlord. Leweni has no credentials to be a DATT, but he has been exceptionally loyal to Bainimarama. He will not be missed in Suva. Leweni told the media his mission will be to build defense cooperation with China, to replace what has been lost by sanctions. Interestingly, LtCol. Smith and new MFA Chief of Protocol Maj. Sila Balawa were RFMF participants in a University of South Pacific-sponsored preparation course for diplomats that began before the December coup. We noted that timing to Balawa recently, suggesting coup planners must have had rather detailed personnel plans early on. Balawa denied it, saying he had no idea chief of protocol would be his future until just recently.

Promotions...more coming?

¶5. (C) Commodore Bainimarama announced on July 11 the promotion of Navy Captain Esala Teleni to Commodore and Colonel Iowane Naivalurua to Brigadier. Teleni has been RFMF Chief of Staff and recently became interim Police Commissioner. Naivalurua, who had Brigadier rank when leading Fiji forces in UNAMI in Iraq, is now Fiji Prisons Commissioner. (Comment. We know Bainimarama lobbied the Qarase Government hard for a promotion to two stars. Could that now be in the offing?)

More looking north to China

¶6. (C) When Jim AhKoy was asked by media what he intends to accomplish as Ambassador to China, he noted Bainimarama's "look north" policy for aid in lieu of traditional sources like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. PM PermSec Parmesh Chand recently made clear the IG's interest in tapping into Chinese Premier Wen's offer, made in Nadi in April 2006, of some US\$300 million in soft-loan opportunities to the Pacific region. (We have repeatedly heard frustration from the Chinese Embassy here that the Qarase Government and, since the coup, the IG had shown no interest in exploring such opportunities.) Chand suggested Chinese aid could help

meet Fiji's infrastructure needs. Also, the interim Minister for Rural Development has mentioned the possibility of "Go Farm Fiji" projects whereby Chinese citizens would lease land, develop "build, operate, transfer" projects, and then "resell" to landowners after the projects prove profitable. (Comment: Such a concept sounds extremely unlikely to succeed in rural Fiji.)

Reassuring Fijian land owners

17. (C) Responding to grumbling in the ethnic-Fijian community that the IG is attempting to deal away land rights, Interim PM Bainimarama stressed on July 10 that no native land will be taken away from landowners by the IG. He accused opponents of fear tactics for political gain. Deposed PM Qarase made clear his view that only a lawfully elected government can make changes to land legislation.

Some unions cancel strike; others still planning

18. (U) On July 10, IG Public Services Minister Bune, Finance Minister Chaudhry, and two public-sector unions announced agreement on measures to avert a strike by the unions. Issues in dispute were the IG's 5% pay cut and a reduction in retirement age from 60 to 55. The resolution restores 1% of the pay cut in December, effective from last January. The age issue is put off, pending results of a court case. Other public-sector unions claim, seemingly with considerable justification, that the agreement was orchestrated to make the IG look good by a few union leaders who have taken roles within the IG. Several other unions, without such IG connections, are continuing to threaten strikes in coming weeks, including the Nurses Union. Police have rejected all union applications to hold rallies. Bainimarama has said publicly that the unions have the right to strike, and the IG has contingency plans in place, including to inject more soldiers into the public service as temporary replacements. Nurses shuddered at that vision for hospitals.
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